

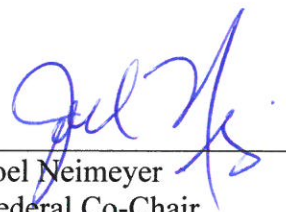


DENALI COMMISSION

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Native Village of Eklutna Interpretive Wayside

The proposed action will be located at the Anchorage Small Boat Ramp on an existing grass-covered area surrounded by asphalt. The project will occupy approximately 650 square feet and will consist of a bronze statue, concrete flatwork, benches, and interpretive panels and artwork.

Based on my review of the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not required.


Joel Neimeyer
Federal Co-Chair


Date

DENALI COMMISSION

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EKLUTNA INTERPRETIVE WAYSIDE

August 14, 2015

Prepared by Chris Allard, Program Manager, Denali Commission

I. INTRODUCTION

In recognition of the traditional use of the Upper Cook Inlet by the Dena'ina, an interpretive wayside is planned to commemorate their relationship with the land, water, and wildlife and to educate the public about this relationship.

The attached Design Study Report prepared by USKH and Earthscape, LLC provides more detailed information about the proposed project.

II. PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Denali Commission is the lead federal agency for this Interpretive Wayside project because they are providing funding to the Native Village of Eklutna through a Financial Assistance Award. Environmental Assessments are required of all projects which are not covered by categorical exclusions.

III. THE PROJECT ENVIRONMENT

A. Overview of the Surrounding Area

The Interpretive Wayside will be located at the Anchorage Small Boat Launch Ramp. This area, located south of the mouth of Ship Creek and the Port of Anchorage and west of the Alaska Railroad Anchorage Depot, is a large fill section (approximately 400 feet by 1000 feet by 30 feet deep) built in the late 1980's on the tidal flats of Cook Inlet. The side slopes are covered with armor rock. The area is accessed from downtown Anchorage by way of North C Street to Western Drive to Small Boat Launch Road.

The boat launch and adjacent parking is at an elevation of approximately 22 feet above mean seal level, or about 40 feet above mean lower low water, and is exposed to winds from the north and west.

The Boat Launch area is located at the end of the road so it is out of the main traffic pattern for Ship Creek. The area is used primarily by boaters, fisherman, and sightseers.

B. Description of the Project Site

The Interpretive Wayside will be sited on the north finger of the boat launch ramp. The paved surface of the finger is approximately 275 feet long and the width varies from

about 55 feet at the east end by the parking area to about 25 feet at the west end protruding into Cook Inlet. The project site is the grass-covered area, surrounded by pavement, located on the east half of the finger. This area is approximately 140 feet long and varies in width from about 35 feet to about 20 feet. The eastern end of the grassy area has a single tree and a large ship anchor and chain. The western end of this area is the site of the proposed Wayside.

IV. THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Native Village of Eklutna has worked with various project partners to develop a design concept for an Interpretive Wayside that will recognize the Dena'ina's traditional use and residence in the upper Cook Inlet area and specifically the Ship Creek drainage. Ancestral Dena'ina harvested hooligan and needlefish at Ship Creek in the early spring in order to sustain themselves before the arrival of ducks and salmon.

NVE and the designers agreed that a bronze statue representing Grandma Olga, a matriarch of the Ezi clan, would be an appropriate commemoration of the Dena'ina historical use of the area. By siting the statue and related contextual art and interpretive panels at the west end of the existing grassy area Grandma Olga can face north looking toward the location of a traditional dip net platform. Visitors can have their picture taken with the statue and have Mt. Susitna in the background.

The conceptual design is sketched in the attached Design Study Report but in general terms the west end of the existing grassy area, approximately 650 square feet, will be prepared and then decorative concrete with embedded colored glass and metal fish will be placed. There will be a fish trap, benches, boulders, and trees and shrubs as well as the statue of Grandma Olga and interpretive panels in a kiosk.

V. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to recognize and commemorate the traditional use of the upper Cook Inlet by the Dena'ina.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

A. Introduction

The Interpretive Wayside is to be constructed on the surface of an existing fill section. There will be no utilities associated with the project.

B. Natural Asset Review

1. Air Quality Including Radon

No effect. This is an open area with no enclosed space and no utilities.

Construction is estimated to take about a week during which time there will be some heavy equipment such as a dozer, loader, compactor, dump truck, and concrete truck that will be used to prepare and construct the 650 square foot site. This

relatively minor use of equipment is much less than the industrial scale of equipment activity at the Port of Anchorage located on the other side of Ship Creek.

2. Surface Water including Wild and Scenic Rivers

No effect. This project will be constructed on the surface of the north finger of the Boat Launch. During a normal high tide (mean high water) there will be approximately 32 feet of horizontal separation between the edge of the project and the water's edge of Cook Inlet. During an extreme high tide, perhaps once per year, there would be approximately 22 feet of horizontal separation from the water. The mouth of Ship Creek is approximately 600 feet from the proposed wayside.

3. Groundwater

No effect. Depth to groundwater is unknown but the most conservative assumption is that groundwater elevation varies with the stage of the tide. During construction the maximum depth of excavation, below the base of the statue, will be approximately two feet. The vertical separation between the bottom of the excavation and the water elevation at the highest tide of the year will be about 4 feet.

4. Sediment Control and Storm Water Management

No effect. NVE or their contractor will submit a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and follow Best Management Practices (BMPs). As described above during a normal high tide there will be approximately 32 feet of horizontal separation between the edge of the project and the water line.

5. Water Supply

No effect. The project does not have a water supply. The closest existing water supply is a restroom and fire hydrant greater than 200 feet from the project site.

6. Sanitary Sewer

No effect. The project does not have a sanitary sewer and the closest existing sanitary sewer serves the restroom which is located greater than 200 feet away.

7. Solid Waste Disposal Including Hazardous Waste and Medical Waste

No effect. The preliminary design includes a trash receptacle as a site amenity. The boat launch facility where the project will be located also has a trash receptacle for the convenience of visitors. The Municipality of Anchorage services the existing trash can and it is expected that they will also service the proposed one.

During construction approximately 3 cubic yards (CY) of construction debris, asphalt pavement, will be produced and disposed of off site.

As much as 50 CY of soil may be removed and disposed of off site. It is not expected that the soil will be contaminated; the project site is separated from the parking area by a wood rail and bollards. There is no vehicle access to the project site.

8. Land Use including Wetlands, Floodplains, Coastal Barriers, Wilderness Areas, Agricultural Lands

No effect. The project site is on the top of a fill section approximately 30 feet above the original intertidal mud flats at an elevation of about 40 feet above Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW). The highest tides are approximately 34 feet.

The fill section was built to provide small boat launch facilities and public access to the coast. The project does not change the land use, it enhances the visitor experience.

The project will not affect any wetlands, floodplains, wilderness areas, coastal barriers or agricultural lands.

9. Hazardous Materials Including Asbestos and CERCLA 120(h)

No effect. There are no known hazardous materials associated with the project site or with the construction of the wayside facilities.

10. Visual Impact

Beneficial effect. The design objective is to commemorate the Dena'ina people with a visually pleasing and culturally informative display. Looking to the north and west, visitors will view the Port of Anchorage, northern Cook Inlet, and Mt. Susitna; to the south the boat ramp and the intertidal flats beyond; and to the east, downtown Anchorage.

The life-size statue and landscaping will enhance the visual appeal of the area.

11. Endangered and Threatened Species

No effect. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that there are no threatened or endangered species in the geographic area of the proposed project and there are no critical habitats within the project area.

12. Energy Use

No effect. There will be no power or other utilities at the project site.

13. Transportation

No effect. The boat ramp and project site are located at the end of a road. Visitors to the area arrive by private vehicle or occasionally by walking or bicycle. The

project will have little if any effect on the number of people who come to the boat ramp and will no effect on access to the water by boaters or fishermen.

During construction there will be about a week of increased truck traffic at the boat launch area.

14. Noise

No effect. The Interpretive Wayside will be an informative and contemplative space generally much quieter than the activity at the adjacent boat launch ramp.

During construction there will be three to five days that will include excavating, hauling, placing, and compacting soil. This will involve the use of heavy equipment and the associated construction noise. The nearest homes are approximately 2000 feet away. Other activities in the vicinity such as the railroad and the port generate significantly more noise on a regular basis.

15. Socioeconomics Including Populations

No effect. The proposed project will not have a disproportionate adverse effect on human health or the environment relative to minority and low income populations. The location of the interpretive site on Municipal land on the coast commemorates traditional use of the coast by the Dena'ina people.

C. Historic Properties and Cultural Resources

1. Historic Properties

No effect. No historic properties will be affected by this project. The interpretive wayside will be located on a massive fill that was placed approximately 30 years ago.

A request for a Section 106 review was submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and they responded on 10 August 2015, "No Historic Properties Affected." (reference Attachment no. 2)

2. Archaeological Data

No effect. No known archaeological investigation of the project site has been conducted. If any cultural or archaeological resources are encountered during construction SHPO will be contacted.

VII. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

If the proposed action were not taken there would be no environmental effect. This is very similar to the no adverse environmental effects of the proposed action. Without the proposed action the beneficial effects of historical commemoration, public education, and visual impact would not be realized.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Design Study Report, Native Village of Eklutna Interpretive Wayside, 2014, by USKH and Earthscape
2. SHPO Documentation, Section 106 Review, 10 August 2015